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Childminding Association

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20 March 2020

Dear Graeme,

COVID-19 – CLOSURE OF SCHOOL AND ELC PREMISES – PROTECTION OF KEY INTERESTS

Yesterday the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, John Swinney MSP, made a statement to the Scottish Parliament about school and nursery closures.

I wanted to write to you to explain in more detail what this means for the childcare sector and to hopefully answer some of the questions you are receiving from members, staff, parents and others. I should say upfront that we don't have all the answers at this time, but we will continue to engage with you to make sure we are supporting the sector as best we can.

In response to the escalating Covid-19 outbreak, Scottish Ministers, following consultation with the Chief Medical Officer and Scientific Advisory Group on Emergencies (SAGE), and ongoing engagement with COSLA, Education Scotland, ADES, SOLACE and the teaching unions, have today taken the decision to advise that all schools and local authority early learning and childcare settings should close to children and young people with effect from 1700 on Friday 20 March 2020, with the exception of any **emergency provision** to protect the following key interests and groups:

- **Key workers:** to ensure that children of key workers, especially NHS staff, have continuing access to all-age learning and childcare, potentially beyond the normal school day, that allows their parents/carers to participate in the national response to Covid-19.
- **Educational continuity:** to ensure S4-S6 can complete course work for national qualifications.

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- **Vulnerable children:** to maintain protections and support for children who may be particularly vulnerable in the current circumstances, particularly in respect of free school meals, children with additional support needs and at-risk children.

What is meant by the term 'key worker'?

Key workers are those in posts which ensure that essential services can be delivered and cover tasks within the local community which support the vulnerable and aid community resilience. This may be slightly different in each community to allow the country to address local priorities. Whilst decisions will be taken at the local level, we would expect this to include consideration of:

- **Category 1** – Health and Care workers directly supporting COVID response, and associated staff; Health and Care workers supporting life threatening emergency work, as well as critical primary and community care provision; Energy suppliers.
- **Category 2** – All other Health and Care workers, and wider public sector workers providing emergency/critical welfare services (e.g. Fire, Police, Prisons, Social Workers, etc.) without whom serious damage to the welfare of the people of Scotland could be caused.
- **Category 3** – All workers without whom there could be a significant impact on Scotland (but where the response to Covid-19, or the ability to perform essential tasks to keep the country running, would not be severely compromised).

What this means for the childcare sector?

We are advising **private and third sector childcare providers** that they can remain open if they refocus their operating models solely to support the children of key workers and vulnerable children and that they do this as far as possible in coordination with their local authorities. These measures apply to **all registered childcare settings** including after school, breakfast clubs and holiday provision.

Childminding services can continue to operate with reference to public health guidance which is under development and will be shared with sector as soon as possible.

We have asked that local authorities give particular weight to the use of private and third sector childcare providers for continued critical childcare provision, to ensure financial support for the sector and to make use of your existing expertise and resources.

The First Minister has also announced that we will guarantee the current state funding private and third sector nurseries receive from the Scottish budget. That funding pays for the statutory entitlement children currently receive in those nurseries and, across the private and third sectors and additional hours already being accessed through early phasing of 1140. It is worth around £220 million per year. We will keep that funding in place even while the children are at home, supporting your members through this difficult time. We hope this goes some way to providing reassurance that the Scottish Government is committed to sustaining childcare businesses throughout this period.

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What financial support is available to the sector?

In light of the expected impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on delivery of our commitment to expand funded early learning and childcare from this August, we have advised local authorities to deploy that funding flexibly to support families and deliver the critical provision of childcare to key workers and vulnerable children. A £350m package of support for our communities was announced yesterday, which includes establishing a £70m food fund to support households who may be worried about accessing food.

Over the last few days a series of announcements have been made by both the UK and Scottish Governments to mitigate the economic impact of coronavirus and offer support for businesses of all sizes facing disruption. We are looking carefully at which of these measures are relevant to the childcare sector, recognising that it is a varied sector with a large number of small businesses and self-employed workers. We will stay in regular contact with you and continue working together to identify any further need for support. The Scottish Government continues to work closely with the UK Government to ensure any support benefits all businesses, including Scottish businesses, and complements existing Scottish Government interventions.

What does this announcement mean for parents?

We know this is an anxious and worrying time for parents and what we are asking parents to do is going to disrupt daily life for a prolonged period of time. We are determined to support parents and communities through this change. There is already a lot of support out there and we will continue to provide support and information to parents. We are updating our Parent Club website with information and resources for parents to access about childcare and home learning. We have developed a factsheet for parents, which I have included with this letter, and we will issue this through our social media channels, through parent representative bodies and we would also encourage you to share with your networks. We hope this goes some way to supporting parents through this difficult time.

ELC Expansion

The closure of provision will clearly have an impact on the expansion of early learning and childcare from this August. Scottish Government and COSLA are working to agree a realistic position for the delivery and timetable of the expansion. In the immediate future we expect that recruitment, capacity development and procurement work will be deprioritised to allow a clear focus on delivering emergency childcare provision for children and families.

What next?

As I said above at this time we don't have all the answers but we are working closely with local authorities to put in place the childcare requirements which are needed most at this critical time. I would like to thank you, your teams and your members for all the fantastic work you have done and I know you will continue to do to provide love, care, safety and support to the children and families in Scotland. My officials will remain in regular contact with you all and please do not hesitate to get in touch with Alison Cumming (alison.cumming@gov.scot), who is now Interim Director for Early Learning and Childcare following Joe Griffin's move to become Director of Safer Communities, or Sheree McAlpine (sheree.mcalpine@gov.scot) at any time.

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I would also like to thank you, your members, and the sector for the offers that are already being expressed by those who want to be part of the response.

I hope this letter provides some reassurance and some answers to the many questions you will no doubt have. I've attached some useful documents and links to this letter.



MAREE TODD

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ANNEX - Attachments

I have attached for you the following information -

- Letter from the Deputy First Minister to all local authorities (separate attachment)
- Factsheet for all childcare settings, this is being issued to all settings today via the Care Inspectorate (separate attachment)
- Factsheet for parents (separate attachment)
- A separate factsheet is being developed for childminders and my officials will share this with you when it is ready
- Operational Guidance from the Care Inspectorate – <https://www.careinspectorate.com/index.php/coronavirus-professionals>
- Link to the Deputy First Minister's statement from today - <https://news.gov.scot/speeches-and-briefings/statement-on-covid19-managing-the-impacts-on-scottish-education>
- Link to the Scottish Government news release from today - <https://news.gov.scot/news/update-on-school-closures-and-exams>
- Parent Club - www.parentclub.scot/elc
- Public Health Guidance - <https://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/a-to-z-of-topics/wuhan-novel-coronavirus/>

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